AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

COMPLETE LISTING OF THE CLAIMS:

Claims 1-10 : (Canceled)

Claim 11 : (Previously Presented) A backplane for establishing a signal connection between a plurality of cards, comprising: a support for signaling lines and a plurality of card slots located on said support in a predefined sequence for connecting the cards, each of the card slots having a plurality of signal-carrier contacts which are located at each card slot according to a same pattern, at least two positions of contacts being defined at the card slots such that a contact at one of these two positions of each card slot that has a successor in said sequence is connected to a contact at the other position of the successor card slot via the backplane, and a contact of a card slot that has no successor in said sequence is adapted to be connected to a contact at the other position of a card slot of an additional backplane, the card slot being located at an end of the additional backplane opposite to the position of said card slot with no successor.

Claim 12 : (Previously Presented) The backplane of claim 11, in that the contact at said one position of each card slot having an n-th successor in said sequence, n being an integer and larger than one, is in communicating connection with a contact at an i-th position of an i-th successor for all i=l, ..., n.

Claim 13 : (Previously Presented) The backplane of claim 12, in that the contact at said one position of each card slot is in communicating connection with an even number of contacts of other card slots.

Claim 14 : (Previously Presented) The backplane according to claim 11, in that the card slots form one or more groups and are located spatially adjacent within each group, and in that the defined sequence in each group corresponds to the spatial order of the card slots.

Claim 15 : (Previously Presented) The backplane of claim 14, in that the defined sequence is a cyclical sequence in which a first card slot of the spatial order of a first one of said groups is successor to a last card slot of a last one of said groups.

Claim 16 : (Currently Amended) An assembly comprising: a backplane and at least first and second cards connected to card slots of said backplane, the first and second cards being connected by a signal line of the backplane, the signal line extending via a contact at a 0-th position of the card slot of the first card, and the first card controlling a safety function of the second card by said signal line, wherein the second card is adapted to detect if a signal connection to the first card exists via a j-th contact of its slot and to ignore control signals appearing at an i-th contact <u>if the signal is detected at the j-th contact</u>, where i is greater than j.

Claim 17 : (Previously Presented) The assembly of claim 16, in that the safety function is an automatic deenergization of a laser source of the second card.

Claim 18 : (Canceled)

Claim 19 : (Previously Presented) The assembly of claim 16, in that a signal connection between an i-th contact of a card slot and an (i+2)-th contact of a succeeding card slot of said defined sequence is interruptible by mounting a card in a card slot located between said two card slots.

Claim 20 : (Previously Presented) The assembly according to claim 19, in that the first card is connected by said signal line to one contact, referred to as the i-th contact, of the i-th successor of its own card slot and with a contact referred to as the (-i)-th contact, of the i-th predecessor of its own card slot for all i=l, ..., n.